

STUDY OF TRUANCY AND DROPOUT PREVENTION

Findings and Recommendations

TRUANCY AND ATTENDANCE

Finding #1 — There is no statewide definition for truancy.

Recommendation

1. **Support the Department of Education efforts in the development of a definition for truancy and request that the Department of Education provide an update to the Commission on Youth on the status of efforts to address truancy prior to the 2011 General Assembly Session.**

Finding #2 – School divisions' accounting on truancy does not provide enough detail on actual truancy practices and intervention efforts.

Recommendation

1. **Request an update from the Department of Education on the development of regulations for reporting of student absences and associated attendance policies. Such an update will occur prior to the 2011 General Assembly Session.**

Finding #3 – There needs to be greater focus for truancy reduction efforts at the elementary school level.

Recommendations

1. **Request the Virginia Association of Elementary School Principals, Virginia School Board Association, Virginia Alternative Educators Association, Virginia PTA/PTSA, Virginia School Counselors Association, the Virginia Education Association and the Virginia Association of Community Services Boards include information on effective programs which reduce truancy of elementary school-aged youth at their annual conferences and trainings.**
2. **Request the Virginia PTA/PTSO share with its membership the importance of school attendance for elementary school students.**
3. **Encourage school divisions to include in all of their truancy prevention programs evidence-based practices that reduce truancy in elementary schools, with a focus on effective school engagement and early intervention practices, the establishment of community partnerships, and methods to engage students and parents in the school community.**
4. **Encourage school divisions to develop a mechanism of identifying students who may need additional school or community supports and direct them and their families to the appropriate services.**

Finding #4 – The Safe and Drug-Free Schools and Communities Acts (SDFSCA) supports programs that prevent violence in and around schools; prevents the illegal use of alcohol, tobacco, and drugs; involves parents and communities; and fosters safe and drug-free learning environment that supports student academic achievement. However, funding for the State Grants portion of the SDFSCA was not included in President Obama's budget and was not reinstated by the House of Representatives. There is already a shortage in Virginia of school-based prevention programs that address issues such as violence prevention, anger management, conflict resolution and other behavioral health needs.

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Recommendation

1. **Write a letter to Virginia's Congressional Delegation requesting that the State Grants portion of the SDFSCA be reinstated in the federal budget.**

Finding #5 – There are barriers to information sharing within law enforcement (e.g., court service units and school resource officers).

Recommendation

1. **Request the Department of Juvenile Justice/Department of Criminal Justice Services to include in future trainings, clarification on information sharing between school resource officers, court services units and law enforcement.**

Finding #6 – There are statewide inconsistencies with the intake process for truancy cases, particularly with filing CHINSup petitions.

Recommendation

1. **Encourage the Department of Juvenile Justice to establish guidelines for Court Services Units on how best to expedite resolution of truancy matters when presented to court service units and to include expectations for court diversion programs those cases.**

Finding #7 – Localities need more flexibility in the current mandated procedure of pupils who fail to report to school for a total of five scheduled school days for the year. Consistently allowing local school divisions the option of allowing “the principal, his designee or the attendance officer” the authority to perform each of the mandated and crucial truancy intervention functions will provide clarity and flexibility to schools.

Recommendation

1. **Amend Section 22.1-258 of the *Code of Virginia* to give more flexibility to local school divisions by consistently stating that “the school principal, his designee or the attendance officer” is responsible for notifying the parents; making direct contact with the parents; and developing students’ attendance plans.**

Finding #8 – Local attendance practices may be inconsistent with the *Code of Virginia*.

Recommendation

1. **Request the School Board Association to work with local school boards to encourage them to review their current practices and policies related to attendance and that they share effective attendance practice and policies.**

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SCHOOL DROPOUT PREVENTION

Finding #9 – Not all at-risk students who might benefit from non-traditional/alternative educational services have access to those services. Students who have been long-term suspended or expelled may be referred to alternative education, but are not required by law to participate. These students fall farther behind and also may become involved in the criminal justice system. Parental support is a critical component for the educational success of these students.

Recommendations

1. **Support alternative education opportunities for students who have been long-term suspended or expelled.**
2. **Encourage cross-district collaboration to expand alternative education options for students.**
3. **Support distant and virtual learning programs for credit recovery that adhere to the provisions within the Virginia Board of Education's *Regulations Establishing Standards for Accrediting Public Schools in Virginia*.**
4. **Support paid career or on-the-job training opportunities for high school students which allow students to earn credits for their participation.**
5. **Support the maintenance and record keeping of those students who are long-term suspended or expelled that are referred to alternative education placements in order to track their success in completing the requirements for graduation.**

Finding #10 – Dropout prevention requires comprehensive planning across multiple service agencies that do not share resources (e.g., education, family, youth agencies), and there is no single source of information regarding dropout prevention efforts across Virginia.

Recommendations

1. **Request the Governor's Office of Substance Abuse Prevention to explore methods for collaborating across multiple agencies, such as developing a website dedicated to prevention and intervention, including dropout prevention and intervention.**
2. **Consider collaborating with a university to develop and maintain a dropout prevention website.**

Finding #11 – Parents are not always aware of the factors that may put their child at-risk of dropping out of school or which options might be available to help reduce that risk.

Recommendations

1. **Request the Virginia PTA and Virginia Education Association develop parent support materials that could be used to help educate parents about dropout risk factors, early indicators, prevention strategies, and available community resources.**
2. **Encourage districts/regions to establish volunteer parent support groups.**
3. **Request that Virginia's Parent Resource Centers include information on their websites and mailings on the factors that place children at-risk of dropping out of school and the options might be available to help reduce that risk.**

Finding #12 – Not all school divisions have a mechanism for identifying and monitoring early indicators of dropout risk.

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Recommendation

1. **Request the Department of Education brief the Commission on Youth, in the summer of 2010, on its work in addressing dropout prevention and truancy, to include changes in the academic review process and other technical assistance efforts related to the Board's Regulations Establishing Standards for Accrediting Public Schools in Virginia.**

Finding #13 – Classroom and behavior management is a professional studies requirement for teacher licensure in Virginia (8 VAC 20-22-120 & 180), but not all school staff – administrators, teachers, and support staff – know how to identify and serve students most at-risk of dropping out of school – those with and without classroom behavior problems.

Recommendations

1. **Encourage on-going professional development to include training on dropout prevention. Training could include early indicators of dropout risk, techniques for developing protective factors in children, classroom and behavior management, and best practices in dropout prevention.**
2. **Encourage school divisions to provide more cross-training between educators and agencies involved in youth and family services, including agencies that support families in crisis.**
3. **Encourage school divisions to consider the implementation of evidence-based programs that provide training for classroom and behavior management and that help staff know how to identify and serve students most at-risk of dropping out of school.**
4. **Encourage school divisions to consider the implementation of student assistance programming which provide wraparound services to students in need.**

Finding #14 – The 140-hour seat rule may be a barrier to graduation. Guidance is needed on how this rule may be waived for students who can demonstrate course mastery.

Recommendation

1. **Direct the Commission on Youth to include in its final report on the Study of Truancy and Dropout Prevention information on the Department of Education's actions addressing the 140-hour seat rule that was sent to the Superintendents in an e-mail correspondence.**